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C O N F I D E N T I A L BISHKEK 000231

DEPT FOR SCA

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TAGS: PGOV PREL MARR MOPS KG

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DELIVERS MANAS DISCUSSION POINTS TO
KYRGYZ FOREIGN MINISTER

REF: A. STATE 25546
 1B. STATE 24422
 1C. STATE 7736

Classified By: Ambassador Tatiana C. Gfoeller, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: During a March 18 meeting with Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Kadyrbek Sarbayev, the Ambassador delivered Ref A talking points regarding planned discussions on Manas Air Base. Although not certain if he would attend a March 31 International Conference on Afghanistan in the Hague, Sarbayev pledged to be ready to begin discussions in Bishkek, on the basis of the February 2 U.S. proposal, on April 2. He added that he would have Presidential authority to negotiate and that, like the United States, the Kyrgyz Republic would not publicize the arrival or activity of the U.S. negotiating team. Sarbayev also said that the Embassy would receive a reply March 19 about the proposed Air Force investigative team's visit into the Hatfield case, and acknowledged that planned strikes by Kyrgyz air navigation personnel against Coalition aircraft could have an impact on the Manas Air Base discussions. Post recommends that the U.S. negotiating team plan to arrive to Bishkek by March 31 (if not earlier) for briefings with Embassy staff before the opening of negotiations. End Summary.

Moscow, the Hague, and Bishkek by April 2

12. (C) The Ambassador met with Foreign Minister Kadyrbek Sarbayev on March 18 to deliver Ref A points concerning proposed Manas Air Base discussions. Reviewing his schedule, Sarbayev informed the Ambassador he hoped to travel to the March 31 International Conference on Afghanistan in the Hague, but commented that he only received the invitation March 17 and needed to obtain President Bakiyev's approval before he could commit to attending the event. However, he reasoned that since he will be attending the upcoming Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting in Moscow, it would appear "anti-Western" if he did not attend the Hague conference. Sarbayev asked the Ambassador whether he should attend the Hague meeting. The Ambassador noted that the Kyrgyz Republic would need to make this decision, but also took the opportunity to deliver Ref B points about the Hague conference.

13. (C) "Regardless of my attendance at the Hague meeting," Sarbayev told the Ambassador, "I will be available to start Base negotiations on April 2." Sarbayev said that he would lead the Kyrgyz negotiating team, which would be composed of officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defense. However, when pressed by the Ambassador, he said that he was as yet unable to identify any specific individuals. Sarbayev confirmed that he has been given Presidential authority to negotiate with the United States regarding the Base.

Venue Not Set, but February 2 Proposal is the Foundation

¶4. (C) In response to the Ambassador's query about the venue for the discussions, Sarbayev said they were still seeking to identify a location but confirmed that it would be in Bishkek. However, he commented that "we are not saying anything about the venue yet in order not to draw attention to it." (Comment: Sarbayev may be seeking to keep these logistical arrangements close-hold in order to minimize knowledge of the planned discussions from other Kyrgyz officials. End comment.) Sarbayev acknowledged that our February 2 offer would constitute the basis for discussions over Manas Air Base's future. The Ambassador reviewed the proposed composition of the U.S. team with Sarbayev.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador advised Sarbayev that if no agreement is reached during the U.S. team's visit, then the team will proceed to discuss the orderly withdrawal of U.S. forces from Manas Air Base. In response to the Ambassador's remark that the U.S. side did not intend to publicize the team's arrival or activity here, Sarbayev said that the Kyrgyz side would adopt the same approach.

Other Base-Related Issues

¶6. (C) The Ambassador asked for a response to the Embassy's February 24 diplomatic note regarding MFA assistance in coordinating the visit of an Air Force legal team seeking to continue work on the Hatfield investigation (ref C). Sarbayev said that the Embassy would receive a reply March 19.

¶7. (C) The Ambassador also raised threats by Kyrgyz air navigation personnel to conduct a 24-hour strike April 1 against Coalition aircraft operating out of Manas Air Base as well as the plan for an open-ended full-time strike starting May 1. Any such actions, the Ambassador cautioned, could have an adverse effect on discussions regarding Manas Air Base's future, and she suggested that Kyrgyz authorities resolve demands by Kyrgyz air navigation authorities for increased payments for their services. Sarbayev acknowledged the significance of this issue.

Comment

¶8. (C) The Foreign Minister was cordial during the meeting, and seemed eager to begin discussions April 2. Based on this and previous meetings, Post recommends that the U.S. team proceed with plans to arrive to Bishkek by March 31 (if not earlier) in order to start be briefed by Embassy staff before commencing discussions with the Kyrgyz April 2. As requested Ref A, Post will begin compiling a list of possible issues and questions the Kyrgyz might raise during the discussions and drafting potential responses for use by the U.S. team. While we are heartened that Sarbayev indicated the Kyrgyz do not plan to publicize our team's visit, it is likely that its presence will not go unnoticed, and the team should be prepared with contingency press guidance in the event the talks become public knowledge.

GFOELLER